United Nations S/PV.5567

Security Council

Sixty-first year

Provisional

5567th meeting

Tuesday, 21 November 2006, 10 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Voto-Bernales	(Peru)
Members:	Argentina	Mr. García Moritán
	China	Mr. Liu Zhenmin
	Congo	Mr. Ikouebe
	Denmark	Ms. Løj
	France	Mr. De Rivière
	Ghana	Mr. Yankey
	Greece	Mrs. Papadopoulou
	Japan	Mr. Oshima
	Qatar	Mr. Al-Nasser
	Russian Federation	Mr. Shcherbak
	Slovakia	Mr. Burian
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Thompson
	United Republic of Tanzania	Mr. Manongi
	United States of America	Mr. Bolton

Agenda

The situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-154A.

06-62381 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I should like to inform the Council that I have received letters from the representatives of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Finland, Germany and Italy in which they request to be invited to participate in the consideration of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite those representatives to participate in the consideration of the item without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Prica (Bosnia and Herzegovina) took a seat at the Council table; the representatives of the other aforementioned countries took the seats reserved for them at the side of the Council Chamber.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

Members of the Council have before them document S/2006/900, which contains the text of a draft resolution prepared in the course of the Council's prior consultations.

I wish to draw the attention of the members of the Council to document S/2006/810, containing a letter dated 12 October 2006 from the Secretary-General transmitting the thirtieth report on the implementation of the Peace Agreement on Bosnia and Herzegovina.

I also wish to draw attention to document S/2006/809, containing a letter dated 12 October 2006 from the Secretary-General, transmitting the seventh report on the activities of the European Union military mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

It is my understanding that the Council is ready to proceed to the vote on the draft resolution. Unless I hear any objection, I shall put the draft resolution to the vote now.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

A vote was taken by show of hands.

In favour:

Argentina, China, Congo, Denmark, France, Ghana, Greece, Japan, Peru, Qatar, Russian Federation, Slovakia, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United Republic of Tanzania, United States of America

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): There were 15 votes in favour. The draft resolution has been adopted unanimously as resolution 1722 (2006).

The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The Security Council will remain seized of the matter.

The meeting rose at 10.15 a.m.

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United Nations S/PV.5568

Security Council

Sixty-first year

Provisional

5568th meeting

Tuesday, 21 November 2006, 10.20 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Voto-Bernales	(Peru)
Members:	Argentina	Mr. Mayoral
	China	Mr. Liu Zhenmin
	Congo	Mr. Ikouebe
	Denmark	Ms. Løj
	France	Mr. De La Sablière
	Ghana	Mr. Yankey
	Greece	Mr. Vassilakis
	Japan	Mr. Oshima
	Qatar	Mr. Al-Nasser
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	Slovakia	Mr. Burian
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Pierce
	United Republic of Tanzania	Mr. Manongi
	United States of America	Ms. Wolcott Sanders

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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06-62387 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I should like to inform the Council that I have received letters from the representatives of Cuba, Finland, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Israel, in which they request to be invited to participate in the consideration of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite those representatives to participate in the consideration of the item, without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Gillerman (Israel) took a seat at the Council table; the representatives of the other aforementioned countries took the seats reserved for them at the side of the Council Chamber.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter dated 20 November 2006 from the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations, which will be issued as document S/2006/904 and which reads as follows.

> "I have the honour to request that, in accordance with its previous practice, the Security Council invite the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations to participate in the meeting of the Security Council being held on Tuesday, 21 November 2006, regarding the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question."

I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite the Permanent Observer of Palestine to participate in the meeting, in accordance with the Council's provisional rules of procedure and previous practice in this regard.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Mansour (Palestine) took a seat at the Council table.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to Mr. Ibrahim Gambari, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs.

It is so decided.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Security Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

The Security Council will now hear a briefing by Mr. Ibrahim Gambari, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, to whom I give the floor.

Mr. Gambari: This past month, we have witnessed an alarming escalation in violence between the Israelis and the Palestinians, as well as political developments in Israel, the occupied Palestinian territory and Lebanon, almost all of which have a negative impact on the prospects for peace and stability in the region.

There have been intense confrontations between the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) and Palestinian militants, as the IDF's rolling military operation in Gaza enters its sixth month. The operation is aimed at curbing the launching of rockets by Palestinian militants against Israeli civilian targets. The Council has already been briefed on the tragic events in Beit Hanoun, in which a week-long Israeli incursion included an artillery attack that killed more than 20 Palestinian civilians. In addition to the high number of human casualties, the IDF operation in Beit Hanoun resulted in an estimated $3.7 million in damage to local infrastructure, according to United Nations Development Programme figures. As the Council is aware, the General Assembly, meeting in emergency special session, adopted a resolution on Beit Hanoun (General Assembly resolution ES-10/16), which includes a request for the Secretary-General to send a fact-finding mission and report back in 30 days.

In the West Bank and Gaza, a combined total of at least 128 Palestinians were killed and over 380 were injured during the past month, including at least 19 children. One Israeli soldier and one civilian were killed, and many injuries were reported.

Palestinian militants fired over 200 rockets and mortars this month into the western Negev region,

including several that struck just as the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Louise Arbour, was visiting Sderot earlier today. The rockets have caused one death, multiple injuries and significant damage. Schools in the area have been closed intermittently since October. The town of Sderot, in particular, has borne the brunt of these indiscriminate attacks. Israel also expressed concern that weapons and explosives continue to be smuggled into Gaza, enabling militants to continue and possibly intensify their attacks against Israeli targets.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas has continued negotiations on a national unity government with Hamas and other Palestinian factions, and there now appears to be an understanding in principle on the elements for the composition and programme of a new government. Prime Minister Haniyeh announced on 10 November that he would be ready to step down as Prime Minister in order to "let the siege be lifted to end the suffering of the Palestinian people". President Abbas also met with representatives of Palestinian factions yesterday with the aim of establishing a cessation of militant attacks against Israeli targets, in exchange for a cessation of attacks by Israel.

Despite the reported progress, announcement of a full agreement on the government is not necessarily imminent. Negotiations encompass a number of outstanding issues, including the release of the Israeli soldier who remains captive in Gaza. The official nomination of the next Palestinian prime minister is expected to occur only if and when the entire agreement is concluded.

The Palestinian Authority's unprecedented fiscal crisis looms in the background of these political negotiations. The Palestinian Authority received only $500 million between March and September, which amounts to only 40 per cent of its revenues for the same period last year. The wage bill has continued to increase, as has net lending, reflecting non-payment of bills by consumers. Palestinian Authority revenues have fallen mainly because Israel refuses to hand over indirect taxes it collects on behalf of the Palestinian Authority, amounting to approximately half a billion dollars.

The fiscal crisis has contributed to a serious decline in the delivery of public services. A large majority of public schools in the West Bank remain closed, and West Bank public health facilities offer only emergency treatment, chemotherapy and dialysis. Stocks of essential drugs and medical disposables throughout the occupied Palestinian territory have been depleted, and health centres in Gaza have been hampered by electricity shortages.

Turning to Israeli political developments, Prime Minister Olmert moved to strengthen his coalition at the end of October by including the Israel Our Home party in the Government and by appointing Avigdor Lieberman, the party's Chairman, as Deputy Prime Minister and Minister in charge of Strategic Affairs. This appointment has caused concern in the peace camp in Israel and alarm among Palestinians.

Prime Minister Olmert visited the United States this month and held talks with Administration officials in Washington on a number of issues, including, of course, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Regarding movement and access, I would like to observe that one year ago, on 15 November, the Agreement on Movement and Access was concluded. Implementation of that Agreement, intended to promote peaceful economic development and to improve the situation in the Gaza Strip, has been limited. Despite the stationing of European Union (EU) observers, the Rafah crossing between Gaza and Egypt has been open for only 58 per cent of scheduled opening hours over the past year and for only 9 per cent of the scheduled time since June of this year. The Karni crossing has been open for only 44 per cent of scheduled opening hours, with opening hours changing on an almost daily basis.

Gaza export targets, which the Agreement had set at 150 trucks per day by end of 2005, rising to 400 trucks per day by end of 2006, remain just that: targets. Over the past year, Palestinians have been allowed to export on average only 18 truckloads of produce per day, a small fraction of even the lower of the two targets. It should be noted here that the targets were calculated on the basis of minimum export levels needed to prevent the further decline of the Palestinian economy and suffering of the population.

No Palestinian worker has been allowed to cross at Erez to access jobs in Israel since March 2006, and no progress has been reported on bus or truck convoys between Gaza and the West Bank. Similarly, there has been no progress reported on plans to rebuild the seaport and the airport. One year after signing the agreement, the Government of Israel still has not

presented its plan to reduce internal closure measures inside the West Bank. In fact, the number of obstacles has increased from 400 one year ago to 542 today, many of these manned by soldiers.

This month, the Israeli press reported that the Government of Israel and the Settlers Council had agreed on a plan to evacuate 15 illegal outposts, partially evacuate four and legalize eight. However, that report has not received official confirmation. An official denial would help to dispel any lingering impression that the Government plans to sanction the establishment of a further eight settlements in contravention of previous agreements. Despite the stated intention of the Government to evacuate outposts in accordance with the Road Map, no action has been taken to date in that regard. The lack of action to freeze settlement activities in response to repeated Quartet appeals is a matter of serious concern. Moreover, it has a direct and far-reaching impact on movement and access: many of the impediments to Palestinian movement in the West Bank exist primarily to provide security for illegal settlements as opposed to monitoring movement into Israel proper.

Israel also continued construction on the barrier. The Secretary-General's report (A/ES-10/361) on the establishment of a register of damage related to Israel's construction of the wall was submitted to the General Assembly on 17 October. The report presents the institutional framework required for the register of damage, the establishment of which was requested by the General Assembly.

I now turn to developments in Lebanon. The political and security situation in Lebanon continues to deteriorate. Earlier today, Pierre Gemayel, Lebanon's Minister of Industry and one of the leaders of the 14 March coalition, was killed by gunmen, who opened fire as his convoy drove through a Christian neighbourhood near Beirut. This assassination occurred in the midst of an increasingly complex political environment. From 6 to 11 November, Lebanese political leaders engaged in a process of national consultations initiated by the Speaker of the Lebanese Parliament, Nabih Berri. In four sessions, the leaders discussed critical issues facing the country but could not, unfortunately, reach a consensus. This led, several days later, to the resignation from the Government of five Shia ministers and one Christian minister.

In our view, and with the threat of even greater violence looming over Lebanon's political horizon, it is imperative that the parties do their utmost to work together for Lebanon to make progress towards the important political and socio-economic objectives and challenges that lie ahead. To this end, the Secretary-General's Personal Representative for Lebanon, Geir Pedersen, continues to encourage all the parties to return to the negotiating table with the aim of finding a consensus.

The cessation of hostilities with Israel continues to hold, with no major violations of the Blue Line. However, almost daily and often provocative Israeli overflights over Lebanon, including mock attacks on United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) troops, continue, despite repeated United Nations calls for an end to these violations.

The IDF has withdrawn from the areas surrounding the village of Ghajar. The tripartite meetings between the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), the IDF and UNIFIL continued to provide a constructive forum, inter alia on the situation pertaining to the village of Ghajar, and all sides remain optimistic that finalization of the temporary security arrangement for Ghajar can be achieved in the near future. A more detailed report on progress in the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) will, of course, be provided by the Secretary-General to the Council on 30 November.

On 15 November, the Secretary-General presented to the Security Council his report on the establishment of a tribunal of an international character pursuant to resolution 1664 (2006). In that regard, the Legal Counsel, Mr. Nicolas Michel, addressed the Council only yesterday.

We have seen another month of violence in the Middle East, one that, for the tragedy at Beit Hanoun, will almost certainly be remembered as a dark hour in this very protracted and tragic conflict. Again, civilians on both sides have suffered as a result of the conflict. Palestinians are mourning the loss or injury of more than 240 friends and relatives in Beit Hanoun, which was devastated by repeated Israeli incursions. Only a few kilometres away, in the Israeli town of Sderot, Israelis are grieving the death of one person and the injury of 14 others who were hit by Palestinian rocket fire.

The events of this month highlight once again the fact that this conflict cannot be resolved through military means. Once again, we fully acknowledge Israel's right to self-defence, as long as it is exercised in accordance with international law. However, the incursions into Beit Hanoun produced a huge number of non-combatant deaths, revealing a manifestly excessive use of force. Moreover, there was a subsequent increase in rocket fire into Israel, even though the stated purpose of the operation was to stop such attacks. Such actions and counteractions intensify anger against Israel, both among Palestinians and throughout the Middle East. They exacerbate existing resentment over the continued occupation, with apparently no end in sight. In the light of these results, it is hard to see the effectiveness of such operations. Palestinian rocket fire, which is legally and morally wrong, is also counterproductive. The occupation of Palestinian territory that began in 1967 will not be brought to an end through indiscriminate attacks against Israeli civilians.

It is of critical importance to return to the political track. Israelis and Palestinians both need to receive reassurance that the prospect of actually solving the conflict is not dead. New initiatives from the international community are taking shape, and a reinvigorated third party intervention may help to push the parties to move beyond the current impasse. The Secretary-General fervently hopes that the Quartet will take concrete steps — and take them soon — to promote a return to negotiations.

At this moment, however, it is difficult to see a breakthrough without the establishment of a new Palestinian government that puts the Palestinian Authority as a whole in a position to better address the needs of the people, to fully engage with the international community, to ensure the release of the Israeli soldier currently held captive in Gaza and to maintain a cease-fire. The establishment of such a government as a culmination of President Abbas's efforts is a worthy goal in itself.

Movement in the right direction should be encouraged by the international community and rewarded when it occurs. The United Nations, therefore, continues to encourage the efforts of President Abbas to establish a Palestinian government whose political programme reflects the basic tenets of the peace process, as the Quartet agreed on 20 September. Formation of such a government would also help lift the restrictions on donor funding to its institutions, which is crucial, given the gravity of the Palestinian Authority's fiscal crisis.

Israel, for its part, must also act responsibly to calm the situation and bring about conditions in which negotiations can resume. Israel should act prudently and proportionally in defending its citizens, so as to avoid civilian casualties. Operating with area weapons like artillery in civilian neighbourhoods such as Beit Hanoun makes civilian casualties inevitable. A review of the entire policy of military pressure may well be in order. Israel should also meet its agreements and obligations, establishing a clear timeline and method for dismantling settlement outposts, as set out in the Road Map, and transferring value added tax and customs revenues that it collects on behalf of the Palestinian Authority. The absence of such transfers is depriving Palestinian Authority civil servants of their salaries and hurting close to a million dependents, as well as weakening the Palestinian Authority institutions on which a Palestinian State is meant to be based.

Furthermore, progress on the regional peace track is also necessary to stabilize an increasingly volatile situation in the Middle East. The Syrian role is crucial in a number of areas, and we continue to hope that international initiatives to encourage a more positive role will, in fact, bear fruit. We also continue to hope that adversaries within the region will begin talking to resolve their differences. Any and all opportunities for dialogue, however difficult, should be explored.

Finally, I believe that the inspiration for peace must come from somewhere, and where better than from those Israelis and those Palestinians who have been hurt the most by this prolonged conflict. Statements from victims on both sides of the Israeli-Palestinian divide suggest that there is a growing fatigue with the current state of affairs and a desire to progress towards a solution, rather than continuing to engage in a never-ending cycle of punishment and revenge.

We hope that, with the assistance of the international community, Israeli, Palestinian and other regional leaders will be able to achieve such progress before the end of this year. Certainly, the people of the region deserve no less.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Mr. Gambari for the information that he has provided to us.

I now give the floor to the Permanent Observer of Palestine.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): Before delivering my written statement, I would like to convey, on behalf of the Palestinian people and the Palestinian leadership, our deepest condolences to the Gemayel family and to the Government and the people of Lebanon on the tragic crime that was committed this morning in Lebanon. We are confident that the sisterly nation of Lebanon is strong enough to withstand this crime and to move ahead towards a bright future for the great people of Lebanon. I also want to thank Mr. Gambari for his briefing.

Ten days ago, we met in this Chamber in the hope that the Council would take a swift and determined stance to address the grave situation occurring in the occupied Palestinian territory, in particular the condemnable massacre that took place in Beit Hanoun on 8 November 2006. Like many other times prior to this tragic incident, we had hoped that the Security Council would shoulder its responsibilities and undertake the necessary action to remedy the grave situation to which the entire world was bearing witness. Yet, once again, not only were we let down, but the individuals who lost family members and the victims themselves have also been let down.

Even for the people of Gaza — a people who have been forced to endure the insurmountable grief of death and destruction — the loss in Beit Hanoun was too great to bear. Loads of ambulances lined up, carrying the unrecognizable and mutilated bodies of 16 members of the same extended family, the majority of whom were women and children, all of whom were civilians. The total number of those killed in the Beit Hanoun massacre, a civilian-populated neighbourhood, rose to 19, thus adding to the over 82 others killed earlier in the same Israeli military aggression, which centred mainly on Beit Hanoun. Moreover, the overall count of Palestinians killed since last June in the wider military aggression carried out in Gaza now numbers over 450.

It should be highlighted that, after the inaction by the Security Council, Israel, the occupying Power, continued its aggression against the captive civilian population, including through air strikes on the Gaza Strip. This resulted in the killing of more Palestinians, including a 15-year-old boy and a 20-year-old. Furthermore, the Israeli occupying forces also continued to carry out incursions into the occupied West Bank, killing and wounding several civilians. In fact, the latest Israeli crimes occurred today, 21 November 2006, and yesterday, 20 November, in the West Bank town of Qalqilya when the Israeli occupying forces carried out yet another extrajudicial execution, killing two Palestinians they had illegally targeted, as well as six innocent bystanders.

The inaction of the Security Council, which was specifically due to a veto by one permanent member, led us to the resumption of the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly, in accordance with the Uniting for Peace formula. We had hoped that Member States would collectively undertake what the Security Council had been unable to do. Indeed, the international community took up the reins of responsibility and voted nearly unanimously in favour of a draft resolution which was practically identical to the one put before the Council.

We thank the entire international community that voted in that manner. Out of the 169 present for the voting, 156 voted in favour of the resolution (General Assembly resolution ES-10/16), sending a loud and clear message to the parties. Those 156 countries cannot be hijacked. One should respect the integrity of the entire collective voting of the Non-Aligned Movement, the entire collective voting of the European Union, the entire collective voting of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, the entire collective voting of all of the countries in South America, the entire collective voting of the Arab League of nations, and the votes of other nations in Asia.

As for the Israeli side, the resolution called for an end to its military aggression, which endangers the Palestinian civilian population. Of course, in the resolution there are obligations on both sides, but, as an occupying Power, Israel is ultimately obliged to ensure the safety and well-being of the Palestinian people it holds hostage in its 39-year-old occupation; this is an obligation it has continued to ignore in the most violent and brutal manner.

It should be mentioned that this is not the first time that the Security Council has failed to uphold its responsibilities, despite the fact that since 1967 the Council has adopted more than 40 resolutions

specifically on the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. One of the main problems is that the Council has been unable to take the actions necessary for implementation of those resolutions, and thus for bringing about compliance by Israel, the occupying Power, with its obligations under international law, including international humanitarian law and human rights law.

In that regard, Israel's policies and practices against the Palestinian people, who have been under its occupation since 1967, have included not only systematic human rights violations, but acts constituting grave breaches of the Fourth Geneva Convention, under its article 147 — that is, war crimes, which are carried out with complete impunity. That has not only aggravated the situation by failing to bring about an end to the violations — including an end to Israel's belligerent military occupation itself — but has also prolonged a conflict that has caused so much suffering, loss and hardship for the Palestinian people, as well as for the entire region.

To be fair, this is not due to a failure of the membership in its entirety; rather, it is due mainly to one permanent member, which has consistently prevented the Council from taking serious action, has provided the occupying Power with unjustified diplomatic protection and has actively tried to neutralize and contradict international law. The consequences of that behaviour have been extremely detrimental, not only in terms of the rights of the Palestinian people, but also in terms of the international system and its authority and credibility. That pattern of behaviour has undermined the rule of law and deepened doubt regarding the Security Council and the United Nations itself, sending the wrong message to Israel, the occupying Power, which has continued to act as if it were above the law.

The situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, continues to deteriorate dramatically and the toll of death and destruction continues to rise as a result of the aggression being carried out by the Israeli occupying forces against the Palestinian people. We continue to reaffirm that it is incumbent upon the international community to address this crisis. We have continued since September 2000 to reiterate our calls for amelioration of the suffering caused to the Palestinian people as a result of the ongoing and escalating flagrant violation of their human rights as defined by international humanitarian law and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Unfortunately, those calls have fallen upon deaf ears. Consequently, since that time, more than 4,300 Palestinians, including many children, have been killed. In addition, tens of thousands have been injured, many of whom have been permanently disabled as a result of the serious injuries sustained. The Israeli occupying forces have also committed themselves to continuing with their crimes of extrajudicial killings; the destruction of homes, buildings, agricultural fields, roads and other infrastructure; the confiscation of more land for illegal settlement activities and for Israel's expansionist wall; and the destruction of Palestinian institutions. At the same time, the Israeli occupying forces have tightened their military siege and their restrictions on the freedom of movement of all Palestinian persons and goods, virtually dividing the occupied Palestinian territory into several detention centres.

Despite the aforementioned, the Palestinian side remains committed to finding a peaceful solution through diplomatic means. The Palestinian side — in particular President Mahmoud Abbas — is actively engaged in formulating a national unity government, efforts which will soon come to fruition.

Moreover, others have spoken in the same vein about the importance of finding a diplomatic solution. In that regard, three countries of the European Union, namely France, Italy and Spain, have unveiled a Middle East peace plan amid the frustration over the latest developments between the Israeli and Palestinian sides. We welcome that initiative, which includes, among other things, an immediate ceasefire in the region, a Palestinian national unity government and talks between Israel's Prime Minister and the Palestinian President, plus an exchange of prisoners between the two parties, an international mission in Gaza to monitor a ceasefire and the convening of an international peace conference on the conflict in the Middle East. As the Prime Minister of Spain correctly pointed out,

> "We cannot remain impassive in the face of the horror that continues to unfold before our eyes. Violence has reached a level of deterioration that requires determined, urgent action by the international community."

Even some on the Israeli side are calling for a diplomatic solution. In that connection, senior Israeli ministers — including, among others, Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni, Vice Premier Shimon Peres and Defence Minister Amir Peretz — have all called on Prime Minister Olmert to initiate a plan to break the diplomatic impasse with the Palestinian Authority, including calls for an immediate ceasefire. After a telephone call between Mr. Peretz and President Abbas yesterday, it was clear that they had agreed that an immediate and mutual ceasefire was needed.

However, it seems that the Israeli Prime Minister would rather ignore them as he continues to pursue his illegal policies and practices. According to Israeli news reports, Mr. Peretz told Mr. Olmert, "I am not a minister of assassinations", referring to the policy of targeted killings. He continued, "I am the head of the peace camp. I need to talk about a ceasefire. I am not only responsible for the intensity of the fire."

It is high time that Israel, the occupying Power, and the Security Council heed not only the calls of the international community, especially the General Assembly, but the calls among its own, to prevent further massacres and tragedies from occurring.

It is never too late for mistakes of the past to be rectified. In that regard, we assert our hope that the Security Council will soon assume its rightful and proper role and use its authority to address this issue. That can be done only by ending the grave breaches being committed by Israel, the occupying Power, and by bringing an end to the hostilities and salvaging the prospects for reaching a peaceful settlement on the basis of international law, the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Quartet Road Map and the Arab Peace Initiative adopted in Beirut in March 2002. The Palestinian people hope that the next time we are forced to return to the Security Council, it will finally uphold its duties and responsibilities and thus save us all from the tragedy of more death, destruction and misery.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank the Permanent Observer of Palestine for his statement.

I now call on the representative of Israel.

Mr. Gillerman (Israel): Let me start by thanking you and congratulating you on your very able leadership of the Security Council during this month. We know that you have not been doing this for long, but you are doing it professionally and as a great veteran. We thank you. I would also like to thank Mr. Gambari for his informative and concise report.

I would like to start by expressing the condolences and sorrow of the people of Israel to the people of Lebanon for the death of another member of the Gemayel family, which has paid, over the years, so dearly for its moderation, pluralism and liberalism. This death is just another sign of how extremism and fundamentalism are taking their toll in our very, very tough neighbourhood, and how the Lebanese people as a whole and that particular family in particular are paying a high price.

We all know from where that extremism stems, we all know whose fingerprints are so apparent in this pattern of assassinations. We wait for the day when moderation and common sense will prevail in Lebanon as well as in our region as a whole.

We are today discussing the situation in the Middle East. I beg to share with the Council my feeling that, however precise the Under-Secretary's reports are and have been in the past and however many debates we have about the situation in the Middle East, the real situation in the Middle East was made manifest to us today in that horrible assassination.

The real situation in the Middle East is the situation on the ground. It is the situation where the Gemayel family is paying the highest price for moderation. It is the admission, today yet again by Hizbollah, that it is being funded by Iran, that sponsor of terror and master of evil. It is the continuous shelling of Israeli cities by Qassam rockets, killing and maiming innocent civilians.

And yet — and yes, sadly — it is also the plight and pain of the Palestinian people, held hostage by a terrorist Government.

This, Mr. President, is indeed the situation in the Middle East. And all of this can be changed overnight. It can in fact stop right now, as we speak. All that has to happen is, first, that Iran and Syria relinquish terror and stop generating it throughout our region. Secondly, Hamas must accept the three demands of the international community as expressed by the Quartet and this Council. Thirdly, the Hamas-led Palestinian Government must immediately stop firing Qassam rockets into Israel. Fourthly, our boys, Gilad Shalit,

Udi Goldwasser and Eldad Regev, must be released immediately.

All this can end right now, in one second. But it cannot end as the result of speeches here or biased resolutions in the General Assembly. It cannot end even as the result of lectures from that great bastion of democracy and the rule of law, the terror Government of the Palestinian Authority.

It is a decision that only the Palestinian people can take and only the parties can resolve. The choice is clear and the end can be very near. We sincerely hope that, for once, our neighbours will make the right choice. If they do, they will be surprised by how far Israel will be willing to go together with them in order to secure the reality of the peace and prosperity of two States living side by side in this war-torn, bloodshed-ridden region that yearns for peace and has demonstrated yet again today why it needs it so badly.

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): I would like to thank the Under-Secretary-General Gambari for his sobering briefing and for the commitment he displays with respect to this vital issue.

I speak just after the shocking news of the assassination of Industry Minister Pierre Gemayel in Lebanon. We condemn the assassination. It is evidently the act of those with no concern for Lebanon's interests or the interests of a wider Middle East peace. No one gains in the long term by deplorable and senseless actions of this sort. We call on all parties to refrain from acts of violence and for all those with influence over the extremists, inside and outside Lebanon, to exercise it in the cause of peace.

The United Kingdom remains fully committed to a Middle East peace process. It is one of the highest priorities we face. The British Prime Minister has repeatedly made clear that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is at the heart of the challenges faced by the region. Therefore, a solution to that conflict must be at the core of our response to those challenges. We all need to work towards a two State solution: on the one hand, an independent, viable Palestinian State, and on the other, a safe and secure Israel, living side by side in peace and security and as equals.

My Foreign Secretary has been discussing the way forward with Foreign Minister Livni in London today. We hope that there will soon be a Palestinian Government with which we can have similar direct discussions. The United Kingdom welcomes President Abbas' continued efforts to form a new Palestinian Government. We will look at the programme of any Government closely. We wish to see a Palestinian Government with which we can work in partnership, which means that it is based on the three Quartet principles, namely, the renunciation of violence, the recognition of Israel, and the acceptance of previous agreements and obligations, including the Road Map.

When this Council last met in this sort of session on the Middle East, we had just witnessed the awful events at Beit Hanoun. What happened at Beit Hanoun is a tragedy that we cannot afford to see repeated. Equally, rocket attacks on Israel are unacceptable. More rockets were fired at the town of Sderot today, critically injuring one person, even while the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights was visiting.

All sides need to realize that violence simply begets more violence and does not and can never offer the solution. The extremists are not dying for the people. It is the people who are dying for the extremists. It is also important that the abducted Israeli soldier, Corporal Shalit, be released. Equally, it is important that detained Palestinian ministers and legislators also be released.

The United Kingdom remains troubled by the humanitarian situation in the occupied territories. We have given $57 million this year and the European Union has given more to the Palestinians this year than in previous years, some $820 million. I would like to take this opportunity to say that we align ourselves with the statement that will shortly be made by the presidency of the European Union.

The current situation further underlines the necessity of finding a political solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We continue to believe that the Road Map offers the best chance for a lasting peace.

I would like to say a few words about Lebanon. Despite today's tragic event, there has been good progress on implementation of many aspects of United Nations Security Council resolution 1701 (2006), although it is clear that more needs to be done. The United Kingdom hopes that all Member States, and particularly those in the region, will meet the obligations under resolution 1701 (2006) and help the democratically elected Government of Lebanon to implement it. All parties in Lebanon need to work

together in a spirit of conciliation and cooperation to create the conditions in which peace, stability and democracy can flourish. We hope that countries in the region will encourage them to do so.

Mr. Manongi (United Republic of Tanzania): I thank the Under-Secretary-General for his introductory remarks.

Tanzania continues to be deeply concerned by the persisting cycle of violence in the Middle East, despite repeated calls for the cessation of hostilities and a return to dialogue. We are concerned that Israeli troops have continued to target Palestinian militants, resulting in a large number of civilian casualties, while militants have increased rocket attacks against Israel, injuring and killing civilians and damaging property.

We strongly believe that peace between Israel and the Palestinians would usher in peace to the whole of the Middle East region. We also believe that it is not proper for the international community to remain unconcerned in the face of the disastrous course of events and the horror that is ravaging the region. We are concerned that the recent cycle of violence has reached a level at which, unless it is arrested, the cycle may become irreversible.

It is encouraging, however, to note that there is serious awareness of the gravity of the conflict and that several moves are already being taken to initiate a change in the situation in the region. Recent efforts by Spain, Italy and France aimed at launching a new Middle East peace initiative are welcome and deserve solid support. Their plan to arrange a European Union summit in December and to act jointly to initiate political reforms in the Middle East should provide a useful approach to the conflict. We hope that preparations for that important meeting will proceed well and that the outcome of the deliberations will provide a new avenue for resolving the long-standing problems confronting the region.

Progress can be achieved first and foremost if the parties decide to cease hostilities immediately. In our view, a ceasefire, if possible monitored by an international observer force, should allow an atmosphere conducive to tackling other outstanding issues, such as the formation of a Palestinian Government of national unity, the exchange of prisoners and due recognition of the existence of Israel. In parallel, it should then be possible to initiate talks between Israel's Prime Minister and the President of the Palestinian Authority. Similarly, regular consultations between the two sides towards developing a comprehensive approach that addresses a wide range of issues beyond security, including economic issues, should be pursued.

The formation of a Palestinian unity government holds the key to ending the current stalemate and to building a climate of trust in which the political process can be rekindled. The Middle East has never enjoyed peace for long, but the situation has never been worse than it is, given the stepped-up attacks and counterattacks and the economic paralysis on the Palestinian side. We can only hope that deliberate efforts will be taken to ensure that there is no further destruction, deaths and injuries. The Israelis and the Palestinians alike should now realize that the endless violence is complicating the search for lasting peace in the area and that stability is in the interest of everybody.

Turning to Lebanon, we deeply regret and condemn the reported assassination of the Lebanese Minister of Industry this morning. That criminal act is yet another demonstration of the urgent to conclude investigations of previous assassinations and of bringing those responsible for those criminal acts to justice.

We have also received with dismay news of the abrupt resignation of six Hizbollah-associated cabinet ministers and threats of mass demonstration by Hizbollah, seeking more political power. In our view, Lebanon needs time to adjust and to adapt to a host of issues, especially after the summer's war. We therefore appeal for calm so as to facilitate that readjustment and the reconstruction of its infrastructure, which suffered so heavily during the recent hostilities.

Mr. Ikouebe (Congo) (*spoke in French*): I wish at the outset to thank Mr. Gambari for his briefing on a situation that continues to deteriorate.

The news concerning Lebanon that he announced earlier was not at all reassuring. I, too, condemn the assassination of Minister Gemayal and offer his family and the Government of Lebanon my sincere condolences. I believe that this tragic event should not prevent us from encouraging the inter-Lebanese dialogue and, in particular, from combating impunity.

We are holding yet another meeting today, and some would say that we shall merely be making more

statements, but that is simply because there seems to be no definitive solution on the horizon. Instead, the opposite would seem to be true, and yet that is not because the international community has not sought to advance the concrete modalities of a settlement to the crisis that would rule out any use of violence. I would refer to certain approaches that have been repeatedly taken in the past, such as recourse to international law, including international humanitarian law; resolutions of the United Nations; the principles of the Madrid conference; and the Road Map drawn up by the Quartet, with its generous vision of two States. Unfortunately, the second of those two States, Palestine, has yet to see the light of day, which only exacerbates frustrations and tension. I would also refer to the Arab peace initiative announced in Beirut in 2002. In particular, I restate its generous offer of an exchange of land for peace. Other initiatives have also been tried.

Given the impasse, what should be done? The first thing that needs to be done is to implement decisions already taken. The crux of the whole tragedy is that we fail to implement our own decisions. Today, however, I want to be somewhat naïve and cling to an approach that stresses certain positive signals that should be encouraged.

The first of those signals are the attempts, sometimes desperate, of the Palestinian leaders to establish a government of national unity that would allow the situation to be resolved. In our view, the current deadlock punishes the people. We should not give the impression that the international community is trying to punish the Palestinian people for freely exercising its right to democracy by electing its own leaders. Furthermore, we call on those democratically elected Palestinian leaders to abide by the rules of the game by accepting all previously concluded agreements.

We also thank the Arab leaders for sending another positive signal when they committed themselves recently to assisting the Palestinian people, which has been hard hit by sanctions and other restrictions.

We would also like to welcome the announcement made a few weeks ago by Prime Minister Ehud Olmert that he is prepared to hold discussions with President Abbas.

Moreover, we must explore and encourage every possibility to involve all the main regional stakeholders in the various peace processes under way. Here in the Chamber a few days ago, one of those stakeholders — Syria, if I may refer to it by name — clearly indicated to us its willingness to contribute to the search for peace. The representative of that country also told us that Syria was not part of the problem, but rather a part of the solution. We should encourage Syria.

I also wish to note that there have been some stirrings in the Middle East region with regard to another crisis, namely, the situation in Iraq. Meetings between leaders of the region have been announced in an effort to consider how to stabilize the situation.

I believe that those are all developments that we should encourage. Other stakeholders who are not necessarily part of the region could also join in those efforts. We believe that those are signs that must be resolutely encouraged and followed up.

I have told the Council that my delegation's view is somewhat naive, because realism in the course of the last 60 years has brought the situation to a deadlock. My delegation very much believes in the virtues of negotiation. I would like to conclude with an anecdote.

Several months ago, a delegation that we believe to be friendly warned us that the Council had before it an unacceptable draft resolution. We responded that it was possible to improve the text. The reply to us was that that was impossible and that it should not be improved. I said, in turn, that they were talking to the wrong person, because my Government pays me to negotiate. I mention that just to illustrate that we truly believe in the virtues of dialogue without preconditions. For if all draft resolutions submitted to the Council were perfect from the very outset, we would have nothing more to do in either the Chamber or anywhere else. I therefore call upon all actors to give up all of their prejudices and truly begin dialogue.

Mr. Yankey (Ghana): We very much appreciate the briefing we have just received from Under-Secretary-General Ibrahim Gambari on the situation in the Middle East. We share the common concern expressed about the escalating violence and the high number of civilian casualties, especially on the Palestinian side. But we are no less saddened by the assassination of the Lebanese Minister.

In the absence of an active peace process to address the grievances and interests of all the parties involved in the Middle East conflict, we are likely to witness more ugly incidents — such as the brutal assassination of the Lebanese minister and, before that, the tragic incidents in Beit Hanoun and those that took place during the war in Lebanon — as well as the intolerable deprivation and poor humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territories. We agree with the Under-Secretary-General that the status quo is futile and unacceptable. We therefore welcome the proposed initiative by France, Italy and Spain which we have just heard. We hope it will yield some positive results.

We have also heard the repeated denunciation of both the incessant indiscriminate firing of numerous Qassam rockets into Israel by Palestinian militants and the devastating consequences of Israeli reprisals. It is necessary to emphasize that those actions stem from decades of power struggle involving the right to self-determination and independence of both the peoples of Israel and Palestine. Ghana is disappointed that the various peace initiatives have brought the parties no closer to a settlement. Although the Israelis have realized their own State, they must confront various security threats. For the Palestinians, the dream of an independent State remains a distant one that, in fact, risks being compromised permanently, given the evolving situation on the ground. Ghana believes that the way to lasting peace is a just and negotiated settlement that gives the two parties meaningful space to realize their national aspirations.

We also recognize that Lebanon, Syria, Iran and Iraq are essential factors in the equation for peace in the Middle East. But a genuine commitment to peace requires sustained dialogue among all the parties, based on respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all the States in the region.

Today, it is not only the integrity of the Security Council that has been called into question for failing to implement its own resolutions. We also expect the Quartet to deliver on its promise to implement the road map for peace in the Middle East. That is the only way to assure the Palestinians that the international community is committed to helping them realize their aspirations for national independence. At the same time, the security of Israel must be recognized as a constant in the equation for peace, and the necessary guarantees given so that the Israelis no longer feel singled out for condemnation by the international community whenever they take steps to defend their national security.

Mr. De La Sablière (France) (*spoke in French*): First of all, I wish to refer to the situation in Lebanon to express the deep shock and concern of French authorities at the cowardly assassination this morning in Beirut of Pierre Gemayel, the Minister for Industry. France would like to extend its condolences to the family of Mr. Gemayel. We condemn in the strongest terms this new attempt to destabilize Lebanon through violence, intimidation and assassination. France also reaffirms its commitment to the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Lebanon, as well as our support for the legitimate and democratically elected Government of Mr. Fouad Siniora. At a time when the Security Council is considering the establishment of an international criminal tribunal, the international community must send those who employ assassination and violence a message that their crimes will not go unpunished. As the Secretary-General has said, there will be no peace without justice in Lebanon.

I would like to thank Mr. Gambari for his briefing. France is also very concerned about the ongoing violence in Israel and the Palestinian territories. In this Chamber on 9 November 2006 (see S/PV.5564), I expressed my country's great shock at the tragic events that cost the lives of many Palestinian civilians in the Gaza Strip, in particular in the area of Beit Hanoun. At the request of the General Assembly, a fact-finding mission is promptly to be sent to the area by the Secretary-General. We hope that this mission will fully elucidate the Beit Hanoun tragedy. We call on all parties to cooperate with the Secretary-General to that end.

Unfortunately, since those tragic events, the situation has continued to deteriorate. Rockets fired by Palestinian armed groups have caused more Israeli casualties, in Sderot. Other Israeli military operations have also taken the lives of Palestinian civilians in the Gaza Strip and in the West Bank. An end must be put to all violence.

The Palestinian Authority must combat terrorism and in particular put an end to the firing of rockets into Israeli territory. The Palestinian Government's failure to take decisive action in that respect is of concern. Israel, for its part, must halt any operations that put civilian populations at risk, in particular the bombing

of residential areas. Israel's legitimate right to defend its citizens must be exercised with full respect for international humanitarian law.

France believes that, given the distressing increase in the number of civilian casualties, there should be an immediate discussion on ways of strengthening the protection of civilian populations. The upcoming meeting of the Quartet could provide the proper framework to begin such a discussion on the basis of the proposals that the Secretary-General, in cooperation with his partners, primarily the European Union, might deem useful to formulate.

The cessation of violence, in order to be effective and durable, must be accompanied by the creation of credible political prospects. We call on both sides to adopt confidence-building measures and to lay the groundwork for the resumption of the peace process.

France calls on the Palestinians to work for national unity. We urge all factions, primarily Hamas, to respond favourably to President Abbas's appeal for the formation of a new government with a political platform reflecting the principles of the peace process endorsed by Mr. Abbas. Such a government, which would be a legitimate partner of the international community, should receive the necessary support for carrying out reforms expected of the Palestinian Authority, including in the area of security.

France calls on the Israelis to refrain from any unilateral action that might prejudge the results of final status negotiations or undermine prospects for the creation of a viable Palestinian State. In keeping with the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice, it must put an end to its settlement activities and to the building of the wall inside the West Bank. Finally, the conditions governing the movement of Palestinians within, between and to the Palestinian territories must improve pursuant to the Agreement on Movement and Access concluded in November 2005 and the Agreed Principles for the Rafah Crossing.

France, together with its European Union partners, will continue to act without letup and with resolve to find a just, lasting and comprehensive solution based on the resolutions of the Security Council, the terms of reference of the Madrid Conference, the principle of land for peace and the Arab Peace Initiative. Given the current impasse, we reiterate our conviction that an international conference, carefully prepared with the participation of all stakeholders, should be convened very shortly in order to revive the hopes of the peoples of the region and help the parties to break the current stalemate. France, Italy and Spain, together with their European partners, are discussing this issue so as to contribute to overcoming the impasse in the peace process. That is the thrust of the initiative taken at Girona.

Mr. Oshima (Japan): Let me state at the outset that we are shocked and appalled by the fact that yet another high-ranking Lebanese official — Minister of Industry Pierre Gemayel — has been killed. Japan strongly condemns that brutal act of violence, which can only destabilize the already volatile situation in Lebanon. We express our deep condolences to the family of the deceased, and we expect that the perpetrators of this crime will be brought to justice, as should the perpetrators of other heinous acts of political violence in that tormented country. For the sake of the country's stability, in our view, the sooner that is done, the better.

I join other members in thanking Under-Secretary-General Gambari for his comprehensive briefing on recent developments in the Middle East. The picture that Mr. Gambari presented to us of the situation in the Middle East is indeed a grim one. It is a matter of deep concern that the cycle of violence between Palestinian military groups and the Israel Defense Forces and the political deadlock in Palestine continue to plague the region and drive it deeper into crisis. Of further concern is the resultant continuing deterioration of the humanitarian situation of the Palestinian population, in particular the heavy toll registered among innocent civilians, including women and children.

The vicious circle will have to be broken. That can be achieved only if political leadership and the will to settle differences are mobilized by the leaders of all the parties concerned.

Japan wishes to make clear that, under the new Government led by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, it remains deeply committed to encouraging and supporting all such peaceful and political endeavours in the region. To that end, Japan will continue to provide all of the support and assistance necessary to address the Middle East peace process in a constructive and proactive way.

On the political front, in recent weeks we have witnessed certain efforts being made by the parties

concerned, including in particular some Arab countries, to help establish a new government of the Palestinian Authority. It is our strong hope that those efforts will continue and that they will produce results acceptable to all.

To break the current stalemate, we urge Palestinians to find ways of overcoming their differences, achieve a breakthrough and support a new Palestinian Authority government that would resume the work previously begun to achieve coexistence and mutual prosperity with Israel. At the same time, we expect that Israel, on its part, will support the efforts of President Abbas, who is striving to achieve such a breakthrough in the deadlocked situation.

If a new Palestinian Authority government, once established, makes clear that it would pursue the realization of peace and peaceful coexistence through negotiation with Israel, then the international community should respond positively and support such a new direction as most welcome. In order to resolve the problems that exist, especially at this critical moment, nothing is more important than direct talks between the parties at the highest level. We therefore strongly hope for an early resumption of the long-delayed direct talks between the leaders of the two parties, Israel and Palestine.

There can be no military solution to the Middle East peace process. All parties concerned should exercise the maximum restraint, refraining from military action and violence on both sides.

Japan strongly deplores the incident that took place on 8 November in Beit Hanoun. We strongly urge the Government of Israel to refrain from taking any military action which may lead to civilian casualties. We also hope that the Government of Israel will make serious and expeditious efforts to determine the causes of the incident in Beit Hanoun and to prevent the recurrence of such tragic events by ensuring that the panel of investigation established within the Israel Defense Forces carries out its work promptly. Japan renews its call upon Israel to release the Palestinian ministers and others held in custody.

At the same time, we urge the Government of the Palestinian Authority to take credible, effective measures to rein in the violence of Palestinian extremist groups, including launching Qassam rocket attacks into Israeli territory. We also renew calls on the Palestinian Authority to bring about the safe return of the Israeli soldier abducted in June.

The deteriorating humanitarian situation afflicting the Palestinian people is a matter of deep concern to the entire international community. To resolve this crisis, the international community should continue to provide the humanitarian relief and assistance that is urgently needed. In this regard, we stress once again that an early Israeli resumption of the transfer of tax and customs revenues to the Palestinian Authority, as well as the full implementation of the Agreement on Movement and Access concluded in November 2005, are matters of utmost priority. Japan, as a major donor of assistance to the Palestinians for many years, will make every effort to continue to provide such assistance.

On Lebanon, serious efforts by the parties concerned and the continued support of the international community are needed to address the issues referred to in Security Council resolution 1701 (2006), including a permanent ceasefire and a long-term solution. On the other hand, Lebanon is going through major domestic political upheavals, which we strongly hope will be resolved by the parties concerned peacefully, through dialogue.

We wish to reaffirm the importance of Syria's role in achieving stability in Lebanon and peace throughout the region. Japan fervently hopes that Syria will positively and constructively engage in the political process and cooperate with the efforts being made by the international community to this end.

Japan will continue to be engaged in the process, working with all concerned countries in the region with a view to defusing tensions, restoring stability and nurturing a spirit of cooperation, which we believe will lead to a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East region.

Mr. Liu Zhenmin (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): The Chinese delegation would like to thank Mr. Gambari, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his comprehensive briefing. We were shocked to learn this morning that Mr. Pierre Gemayel, Minister for Industry of Lebanon, was assassinated earlier today. We express deep regret in that connection. We would also like to extend our condolences to the family of Mr. Gemayel and hope that, at this difficult moment, the Lebanese people will stay calm and maintain domestic peace and stability.

Over the past month, the situation between Palestine and Israel has again intensified, causing heavy casualties among innocent civilians. China is deeply concerned about that. We have expressed our position on this issue on a number of occasions. China has consistently maintained that the conflict between Palestine and Israel should be resolved through peaceful negotiations. We are opposed to all military actions that cause civilian casualties. Israel must strictly abide by international humanitarian law and immediately put an end to military action against Palestine. Palestine should also stop firing rockets into Israel. We hope that both Israel and Palestine will act with maximum restraint and reason, and put an immediate end to the vicious circle of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth and meeting violence with violence, so as to avoid further turmoil in that region.

The key to a resolution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is for both Palestine and Israel to gradually restore mutual confidence and, through peaceful negotiations, find a solution that is truly in the fundamental interests of both peoples.

At the same time, the international community should also provide favourable conditions for the resumption of talks, as well as effective support. The United Nations — in particular, the Security Council — shoulders a heavy responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, and ought to play its proper role in the context of the Middle East issue. This month, both the Security Council and the General Assembly successively convened emergency meetings to discuss the Palestine-Israel issue. We believe that those meetings were timely and necessary, and that they sent a clear message to both sides. Regrettably, the Security Council did not adopt the draft resolution submitted by Qatar. This brings us back to a question: In the face of never-ending conflict between Palestine and Israel, how can the Security Council better fulfil its responsibilities and help both sides to end the violence and achieve lasting peace? That is a question that we all need to reflect upon.

Consultations are currently taking place between the main Palestinian factions, Fatah and Hamas, on the formation of a unity government. We hope that they will continue their constructive consultations so as to reach agreement on the formation of a unity government at an early date. We also expect that such a unity government will be able to assume the important responsibility of leading the Palestinian people in participating in the Middle East peace process.

We hope that both Palestine and Israel will put aside their past grievances and start a dialogue so as to create favourable conditions and an environment conducive to a peaceful resolution of the conflict. We also hope that the Quartet mechanism can play a positive role for the resumption of the Middle East peace process and that the Security Council will continue to fulfil the responsibilities entrusted to it.

Mr. Al-Nasser (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): On behalf of the Arab Group, allow me, at the outset, to thank you, Mr. President, for having convened this Security Council debate to discuss an issue of high priority for the Council: the situation in the Middle East. I should also like to thank Mr. Ibrahim Gambari, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for coming to brief the Council on behalf of the Secretary-General.

Sad news from the Middle East continues to make headlines. We have just learned the tragic news of the assassination of the Lebanese Minister of Industry, Mr. Pierre Amin Gemayel. We express our condolences to the family of Pierre Gemayel, who was the victim of a treacherous criminal act, and to the Government and the people of Lebanon. We firmly condemn that heinous crime, and call for the speedy arrest and trial of those who were responsible.

Everyone is fully aware of how grave the situation in the Middle East has become. The region has been troubled since the beginning of the year — a year marked by several serious incidents leading to the current escalation of the situation, especially in Gaza, since early this month.

The Council failed to adopt a draft resolution that would have responded to the recent escalation and called for the cessation of violence between the Palestinians and the Israelis. In spite of all of the efforts that we, as sponsors of the draft resolution, made, with a view to reaching a fair and balanced text, the draft resolution never saw the light of day. That is what prompted us to submit a similar draft resolution to the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly, on illegal Israeli actions in occupied East Jerusalem and the rest of the occupied Palestinian territory, having earlier requested the resumption of that emergency special session. The draft resolution (A/ES-10/L.19) garnered the support of the

overwhelming majority of Member States, which shows that it was fair and balanced and which confers international legitimacy on its contents.

We all recognize, however, that, under the Charter, primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security lies with the Security Council. Therefore, we do not believe that the adoption of a resolution by the General Assembly is sufficient to deal with this issue.

All acts of violence, provocation, incitement and destruction deserve condemnation, regardless of who commits them. While we believe that a lasting and comprehensive settlement is within reach, we also believe that it can come about only through dialogue. Violence has proved its futility, in resolving this crisis, as it has in other cases.

The establishment of peace in the Middle East is an issue that directly concerns the Arab States. Based on that understanding, we have continuously urged the parties concerned to pursue an approach that promotes the chances of peace. In this regard, we urge all parties to provide full support for Palestinian national efforts aimed at achieving national reconciliation and at forming a government of national unity.

Based on our belief that dialogue is the solution, we were at the forefront of those who called for an open ministerial-level meeting of the Council last September in order to revive the peace process. It is incumbent upon the Council to continue to provide the impetus necessary to move the peace process ahead, including by continuing to hold high-level discussions to highlight the attention that the Council is devoting to this issue.

While the Council should play its role, the international community, and in particular the Quartet, is called upon to take specific and concrete steps to revive the stagnant Middle East peace process on all tracks, within the framework of previously reached agreements and on the basis of relevant Security Council resolutions, the terms of reference of the peace process and the Road Map.

The devastating war launched by Israel against Lebanon last summer left a very bad impact on stability in the region. In addition to the human and material losses it inflicted on Lebanon, it has affected to a large extent the lives of the citizens of a country that has just emerged from decades of internal conflict. That is why the issue of maintaining the stability, security and sovereignty of Lebanon is of critical importance in the quest for peace and stability in the Middle East.

We must also support genuine rapprochement between Lebanon and its neighbour Syria, because close relations between the two sister countries is their only normal and natural condition. Any different situation will not have a beneficial effect on stability in the region as a whole. We are confident that the historical, demographic and geographical ties that exist between the two countries would eventually be the strongest factor in determining the relationship between them.

We look forward to addressing the situation of the Syrian Golan Heights, occupied by Israel since 1967, because that issue is an important part of the crisis in the Middle East. Therefore, its resolution will ease general tensions in the region. There is no doubt that direct negotiations between the two sides is the ideal way to implement the relevant Security Council resolutions and to achieve a settlement of the issue.

Mr. Al-Nasser (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): The establishment of peace in the Middle East is one of the issues that directly concerns us in the State of Qatar. From this standpoint, we have continued to urge the parties to adopt an approach that encourages the chances of peace.

The State of Qatar had lately undertaken diplomatic mediation efforts to reconcile divisions within the Palestinian leadership, because we believe that Palestinian internal stability is a necessary condition for an effective peace process. In this respect, we urge all the parties to provide full support to Palestinian national efforts that seek national reconciliation and the establishment of a government of national unity. Based on our firm conviction in the State of Qatar of the Security Council's primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, we will extend, during our presidency of the Council next month, an invitation to convene a ministerial meeting of the Council to consider all possible ways to help achieve sustainable peace in the Middle East, as discussed at the September ministerial meeting, and to put an end to the violence and counter-violence that have been claiming the lives of innocent people in a region where the conflict is as old as Organization itself. We also look

forward to the active participation of Council members in providing the momentum that will realize that ambition.

Mr. Burian (Slovakia): At the outset, I would like to join previous speakers in thanking Under-Secretary-General Gambari for his monthly briefing and for his update on the current situation in the Middle East.

Slovakia aligns itself with the statement that will be delivered shortly by the Permanent Representative of Finland on behalf of the European Union.

Less than two weeks ago we had a useful and constructive debate on the current developments in the Israeli-Palestinian dispute (see S/PV.5564). The ongoing developments on the ground, unfortunately, only lead us again to reiterate our deep concern about the escalating tensions and increased violence in Gaza and the West Bank. We strongly deplore any action that causes civilian casualties. We therefore call on both parties to exercise the utmost restraint and do everything possible to calm the situation and prevent further dangerous escalation that will only lead to suffering and loss of life. Mutual violence must stop, for there is no military solution to the Israeli-Palestinian dispute.

In this regard, we call on Israel to end its military operations that endanger Palestinian civilians and to take every possible measure to protect their lives. Although we believe Israel has the right to self-defence against terrorism and its perpetrators, its response must always be proportionate and in accordance with international humanitarian law. We also repeat our call for the immediate release of Palestinian ministers and legislators detained in Israel. At the same time, we expect the Israeli Government to continue its commitment to peace in the Middle East, based on principles laid out in the Road Map, and to refrain from such steps and activities that threaten the viability of an agreed two-State solution.

On the other hand, we urge the Palestinian Authority to undertake all necessary measures and make all efforts to find and release the kidnapped Israeli soldier and to prevent further military and terrorist attacks on Israel, notably the launching of rockets against Israeli population centres. We support the efforts and leadership of President Mahmoud Abbas to achieve that goal and to foster national unity among Palestinians.

In this respect, we support the efforts of President Abbas to form a government of national unity that will be committed to the Quartet principles, have a political platform that will enable early engagement to achieve peace and to continue the dialogue on a solution to the Middle East conflict.

We also remain deeply concerned at the economic and humanitarian situation in Gaza and the West Bank. In this regard, we highlight the importance of the temporary international mechanism, which enables the channelling of resources and deliverance of assistance directly to the Palestinian people and thereby address their urgent humanitarian and financial needs. To this end, we urge Israel to resume transfers of withheld Palestinian tax and customs revenues and encourage it to carry out those transfers by way of the temporary international mechanism. We also call for full implementation of the Agreement on Movement and Access and ask that the Rafah, Karni and other border crossings remain permanently open.

We take this opportunity to reaffirm our support for a just, comprehensive and lasting settlement of the Middle East conflict, based on all relevant Security Council resolutions and negotiations between the two sides.

Turning to the latest development in Lebanon, we were deeply shocked this morning to learn of the assassination of the Minister of Industry of Lebanon, Mr. Pierre Gemayel. We condemn that horrible crime as an attempt to destabilize the situation in Lebanon and to disrupt the process of reconciliation in that country. We urge the Lebanese authorities to undertake all necessary measures to investigate this crime and to bring the perpetrators to justice. This pattern of politically motivated killings and violence in Lebanon must be stopped. We express our deepest condolences to the Government of Lebanon and to the Lebanese people on their tragic loss.

We fully support the Lebanese Government, which was legitimately elected last year through free and democratic parliamentary elections, in its efforts and in the steps it has taken to regain control and authority over its whole territory and to re-establish stability and security within the country. Lebanon's sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence have to be respected by everybody. Lebanon and its people have already suffered enough, and further destabilization should not be allowed. The

national dialogue has to continue, with the aim of reaching consensus on several important issues, including the disarmament of all militias in the country, which, through their offensive acts, represent a constant threat to the stability and security of Lebanon and its neighbours. The Lebanese Government has to be the sole authority, with a monopoly on the use of force within its territory.

In this respect, we would also like to emphasize the importance of ensuring full compliance with the arms embargo imposed through resolution 1701 (2006) and of progress towards the normalization of relations between Lebanon and Syria, as well as the delineation of their common borders, including in the area of the Sheba'a farms. We are convinced that the resolution of these issues would significantly contribute to the stabilization of the situation in the region.

Last but not least, we should also not forget about the need to release the two abducted Israeli soldiers kidnapped by Hizbollah on 12 July 2006. We also understand the need to resolve the issue of the Lebanese prisoners, and we encourage the respective authorities to make progress on that issue.

We fully understand that the situation in Lebanon, and in the whole region, is complicated; it will take time to make progress on certain issues. However, we wish to underline that all of this can be achieved only through peaceful means and negotiations. As has already been proven on several occasions, there is no military solution to any conflict or dispute. Reconstruction of the country and further development can proceed only in a peaceful environment. A stable and prosperous Lebanon would significantly contribute to the stabilization of the situation in the entire Middle East region. That is why we call on all countries in the region to contribute positively to the peacebuilding process in Lebanon.

Mr. Mayoral (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): First of all, on behalf of my delegation, I would like to join all those who have expressed their condolences on the tragic death of Pierre Gemayel, Minister of Industry of Lebanon. Through you, Mr. President, we would like to extend our condolences to the Gemayel family, a family which, unfortunately, has shed its blood for Lebanon. This is another reason for my country to be concerned over the future fate and territorial integrity of Lebanon. As we express our condolences, we would like to condemn vigorously this assassination. We hope that the perpetrators will be brought to justice as quickly as possible.

Secondly, we would like to thank Mr. Gambari for his briefing on the situation in the Middle East, on a long-standing conflict. We know that the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is the key to beginning to resolve the overall conflict in the Middle East — and, indeed, not just in the Middle East. Other conflicts, in other countries in Asia and Africa, have invisible links to the matrix of the long-standing Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

At this new stage in the process of destruction, death and hatred which, as we have said, goes back a long time, we believe that we have to begin at the beginning: by taking the initial measures to prevent the conflict from continuing. Within this framework, we renew our call to the parties and to the international community to break the vicious circle of death and destruction.

First, we believe that Israeli military operations that endanger the civilian population in the Gaza Strip should be stopped immediately. Similarly, attacks carried out by Palestinian groups with Qassam rockets into Israeli territory must also cease immediately.

Secondly, we believe that we should continue supporting the efforts of President Abbas to form a government of national unity, without such support constituting interference in internal Palestinian affairs. The international community must contribute and must fully support the process. In this regard, we hope that the talks under way, which have still not reached a successful conclusion, can continue between Fatah and Hamas leaders and that a government of national unity can be formed as soon as possible.

Thirdly, we believe that the immediate and unconditional release of the Israeli soldier, Gilad Shalit, should take place. Similarly, Palestinian legislators and ministers taken prisoner by Israel should be released.

Fourthly, we believe that urgent measures must be taken to ease the suffering of the Palestinian people. Palestinian tax and customs revenues withheld by Israel must be transferred through the appropriate international mechanisms. Likewise, we believe that the Agreement on Movement and Access should be fully implemented, and that the crossings in and out of Gaza should be kept permanently opened.

Here, we must point out that all of those measures would be in vain unless a genuine process of negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians were resumed. The first step should be for Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas to meet and start to negotiate. But this dialogue will not be viable if Israel continues with its policy of faits accomplis on the ground, such as the construction of the separation barrier and the settlement activity in the West Bank. Clearly, such policies should stop in order to begin the dialogue.

Unfortunately, the parties have demonstrated that, on their own, they are unable to take the necessary measures. That is why the active assistance of the international community is required. The Security Council and the Quartet have an important role to play and in future must be as proactive and effective as possible. We also wish to express our satisfaction with and support for the initiative of an international conference, as proposed by the head of State of Spain, with the support of France and Italy. We believe that we must return to the path embarked upon at the Madrid Conference 15 years ago.

Regarding the situation in Lebanon, in addition to expressing our concern about today's tragic assassination — which will obviously increase the tension and deepen the political crisis — we affirm our belief that all the parties in Lebanon must resolve their differences, while respecting the democratic rules of the process, and that they must not under any circumstances resort to the threat of force. All Lebanese actors must act with the utmost caution, taking into account their past and the terrible civil war that they have experienced.

With respect to the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006), we welcome the fact that the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon and the Lebanese armed forces have continued to maintain peace and order south of the Litani River. We consider as positive the measures undertaken in recent weeks to find weapons caches in that area. Nevertheless, we cannot fail to indicate our grave concern at the continued Israeli incursions into Lebanese airspace, which are violations of the cessation of hostilities. We also express our concern that no solution has been found to the issue of the two Israeli soldiers captured more than four months ago.

Concerning other outstanding aspects of resolution 1701 (2006), we hope that the Secretary-General makes some specific recommendations in his next report.

The difficult juncture being experienced in the Middle East demonstrates once again that the path of violence only helps to increase the suffering of the peoples of the region. Therefore, the only viable alternative is that of a just and lasting peace that encompasses all tracks: Palestinian, Lebanese and Syrian. The foundations for such a peace are the relevant resolutions adopted by the Security Council; the Madrid terms of reference, including the principle of land for peace; and the Beirut Arab Peace Initiative.

Ms. Løj (Denmark): We did not intend to touch upon the situation in Lebanon in our statement today, since the Council will soon revert to the matter when we take stock of the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006). However, today's assassination of the Lebanese Minister for Industry requires that we react.

First of all, we reconfirm our condemnation of terrorism and encourage all parties to refrain from using violence as a tool to achieve political goals. The situation in Lebanon is already very fragile. Whoever is responsible for today's assassination is adding to an already tense situation. Such an act is not just a crime that must be condemned; it is also very irresponsible, since it adds to the instability. It confirms that it is important that the International Independent Investigation Commission also assist the Lebanese Government in identifying those responsible for attacks other than that which led to the tragic death of former Prime Minister Hariri.

Denmark continues to be committed to supporting the legitimate and democratically elected Government under Prime Minister Siniora and his efforts to stabilize the situation in the country. We encourage all Lebanese parties to reach consensus and to resume the process of national dialogue.

Denmark aligns itself with the statement to be delivered by the representative of Finland on behalf of the European Union.

When we discussed the latest developments in the Middle East in this Chamber on 9 November 2006 and again on 11 November, I expressed our deep concern about the continuing violence that has led to the increasing and tragic loss of civilian life. The

importance of bringing and end to violence cannot be overemphasized. All sides must cease the use of force for political purposes. That requires an immediate halt to the attacks on Israel. The continuing rocket attacks from the Palestinian territory into Israel are unacceptable. They must be condemned, and the Palestinian Government must take action to ensure that such attacks are stopped. At the same time, Israel must halt its military operations that endanger the Palestinian civilian population. Denmark encourages Israel to ensure that short-term measures aimed at improving the security of Israeli civilians are implemented in accordance with international law and that they do not undermine a lasting solution to the conflict.

In that regard, it is of great concern that the number of Palestinian civilian deaths is increasing. Denmark condemns the loss of civilian lives resulting from the Israeli military operation in Beit Hanoun. We have noted that Israel has admitted that it was a tragic mistake, and we look forward to the publication of the results of the thorough investigation into that horrific incident.

The right of a State to defend itself against terrorist threats does not justify the disproportionate or indiscriminate use of force or action. The disproportionate use of force is contrary to international humanitarian law and tends to defy the very political purpose it is supposed to serve, by fuelling further hatred and conflict.

The challenge is to support and strengthen those forces that are committed to a political solution. That is the only way out of the current stalemate of violence. As a first step, the kidnapped Israeli soldier must be released immediately. Likewise, the Palestinian ministers and legislators in Israeli custody must be freed promptly.

However, in order to pave the way for lasting progress, we must revive the vision of two independent States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace within recognized borders. That vision is a core principle of the Road Map. Certainly, the continued violence is leading us in a wrong and worrisome direction.

Increasingly, collapse of the Palestinian Authority and chaos in the territory seem imminent. It is a social, economic and political collapse that is about to become a grim reality. Clashes among Palestinian factions only aggravate the human suffering and desperation. They run counter to the interests of the Palestinian people. Thus, we support President Abbas's attempt to build national unity and to establish a credible Palestinian government with a platform that reflects the principles laid down by the Quartet.

A functioning Palestinian government is essential for the governing of the Palestinian territories. It is equally critical as a viable partner for the international community in the efforts to alleviate the dire humanitarian situation, to breathe life into the Palestinian economy and to relaunch the peace process. The international community stands ready to support such a government.

Israel has a crucial role to play in improving Palestinian economic prospects. The tax and customs revenues now being withheld should be released immediately. Those revenues can be channelled through the temporary international mechanism, which has proved itself valuable in targeting aid directly to the Palestinian people. Moreover, the Agreement on Movement and Access must be implemented fully and immediately.

In conclusion, I would re-emphasize that all parties must participate if the peace process is to succeed. Regional players should do everything they can to support efforts that could lead to a resumption of the peace process. Neighbours, including Syria, must play constructive roles. And the international community, led by the Quartet, must be willing and able to provide whatever incentives are needed to set the healing process in motion. It is my hope that the Quartet can soon announce when a meeting will take place.

Ms. Wolcott Sanders (United States of America): The United States condemns the assassination this morning of Lebanese Minister of Industry Pierre Gemayel. This assassination is a clear act of terrorism that shows why it is critical that the Security Council support democracy and accountability in Lebanon and, in that vein, support as quickly as possible the establishment of a tribunal as requested by the Lebanese Government in the wake of the assassination of Rafik Hariri. All Member countries, especially Lebanon's neighbours, must stand against such acts of intimidation and against those groups that seek to destabilize and divide Lebanon, and must support Lebanon's sovereignty and territorial integrity. We will

be working with colleagues to develop a text to address this situation and to strongly support the Government of Lebanon.

Nearly two weeks ago, the Security Council met (see S/PV.5565) and considered an unbalanced and one-sided draft resolution. Four members abstained and the United States voted no on that draft resolution.

On 17 November, the General Assembly met in a politically-motivated emergency special session, adopting yet another one-sided and biased resolution (General Assembly resolution ES-10/16) that ignores the reality of the situation on the ground and does nothing to make progress toward greater peace and stability in the region.

The Human Rights Council met 15 November in Geneva, continuing its fixation on Israel to the exclusion of addressing pressing human rights issues elsewhere, including in Belarus, Burma, Cuba, North Korea, the Sudan, Uzbekistan and Zimbabwe.

Regrettably, none of this frenetic activity has made a constructive contribution to the reinvigoration of the Road Map or progress towards the two-State solution. Hastily-called meetings and polemical resolutions are no substitute for determination by the parties to undertake the hard work needed to take steps toward peace. We urge Member States to reject diplomatic theatrics that fail to serve the interests of peace or advance the aspirations of the Israeli and Palestinian peoples for a more secure, stable and prosperous future.

Since taking the reins of power in January, the Hamas-led Palestinian Authority Government has failed in its duty to the Palestinian people to lead responsibly and take the steps necessary to create a better future for its constituents. It is the responsibility of the Hamas-led Palestinian Authority Government to prevent terror, stop attacks from within Gaza and dismantle the terrorist infrastructure. Progress towards peace requires a Palestinian Government that disavows terror and violence and accepts the Quartet principles: renunciation of terror, recognition of Israel and acceptance of previous agreements.

More terror, whether directed at Israel or at the United States, is not the solution. Nor will it enable the Palestinian people to achieve their aspirations. In fact, the opposite is the case. We again call for the immediate and unconditional release of Corporal Gilad Shalit.

The Road Map and the principles contained therein remain the only agreed international basis upon which to move forward towards the two-State goal. The United States remains committed to diplomatic efforts to engage moderate leaders, help the Palestinians strengthen and reform their security sector and support Israeli and Palestinian leaders in their efforts to come together to resolve their differences.

Last week, Assistant Secretary of State David Welch met with his Quartet counterparts — European Union, the Russian Federation and the United Nations — to support implementation of the Road Map. We will continue to work closely with our Quartet partners and our friends in the region to create an environment that will facilitate progress toward the realization of President Bush's two-State vision.

The Quartet has welcomed efforts by Palestinian Authority President Abbas to form a government committed to Quartet principles, and the United States stands ready to renew engagement and assistance to a Palestinian Authority committed to peace.

In Lebanon, on 12 July, Hizbollah launched a conflict that caused enormous suffering and destruction in both Lebanon and Israel. This highlighted the risks of acquiescing in a status quo in Lebanon that permits militias to remain armed and unchecked. We call once again for the immediate and unconditional release of Israel Defense Forces soldiers Eldad Regev and Ehud Goldwasser, kidnapped on 12 July.

The United States supports the efforts of the democratically elected Government of Lebanon as it expands its sovereignty over all its territory. The United States continues to call for the full implementation of Security Council resolutions 1559 (2004), 1680 (2006) and 1701 (2006), particularly the provisions regarding the disbanding and disarming of the militias.

We are alarmed at indications that Syria is working with Hizbollah and other Lebanese allies to destabilize the democratically elected Government of Lebanon.

We are pleased with the Government of Lebanon's significant progress in deploying the Lebanese Armed Forces to the south of the country for the first time in almost 40 years, as well as the historic deployment of the Lebanese Armed Forces along the

eastern part of the Blue Line and along Lebanon's border with Syria.

A rearmed Hizbollah could nullify efforts to restore and maintain peace, so it is vital to implement all the provisions of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006), especially the creation of a zone between the Litani River and the Blue Line free of all armed personnel, assets and weapons other than those of the Government of Lebanon and of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), as well as the embargo on the sale or shipment of weapons except as authorized by the Lebanese Government or UNIFIL.

Syria's political and material support for Hizbollah's continued existence as a militia was made clear during last summer's hostilities in Lebanon, despite the call for the disarmament of all militias in Lebanon in Security Council resolution 1559 (2004). We are concerned that Syria is not abiding by the embargo on unauthorized weapons shipments into Lebanon imposed by resolution 1701 (2006).

The challenges before the United Nations, the international community and the countries in the Middle East demand a serious, realistic approach, and not political posturing. The people in the region deserve no less. The United States remains committed to working with those who can rise to these challenges and who have the courage to reject stalemate and polemics.

Mr. Vassilakis (Greece): We are very disturbed by and strongly condemn today's assassination of Pierre Gemayel. We call on all parties to show self-restraint and to refrain from actions which could cause a deterioration in the already volatile situation in Lebanon and further destabilize the country.

I wish to express our thanks to Under-Secretary-General Gambari for his informative and comprehensive briefing today.

Greece fully aligns itself with the statement to be delivered later by the representative of Finland on behalf of the European Union.

During the past weeks, we have seen an alarming deterioration of the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, and especially in Gaza. Both the Security Council and the General Assembly have examined the tragic events in Beit Hanoun, and I shall not repeat here all that has been said on this issue. However, what is obvious from the events of the past few weeks is that there is no military solution to the problem.

While Greece unreservedly condemns all acts of violence and terror, it recognizes, in this regard, Israel's legitimate right to self-defence and its duty and obligation to protect and safeguard its citizens, in accordance with international law and international humanitarian law. Nevertheless, it becomes apparent that violence only begets violence.

We share the view expressed by many that the existence of a credible political process must underpin all efforts aimed at stabilizing the situation. The framework of this process is outlined in the Road Map. Although there have lately been a lot of questions raised on whether or not the Road Map needs to be re-examined and updated, it seems to us that what is needed is not to reinvent the wheel, but rather to examine ways of making this wheel roll better. In this regard, we welcome the active role and contribution of the Quartet, which would be greatly enhanced by input from the parties themselves and from the countries of the region.

We welcome the recent meeting of the Quartet at the envoy level in Cairo on 15 November, and look forward to an early meeting of Quartet principals, which should, in our view, include a meeting with regional partners as well.

On Lebanon, we are encouraged by progress made in the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006). We note with satisfaction that the overall troop strength of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), when combined with its naval component, has exceeded 9,500 troops. We welcome in particular the fact that Indonesian troops have now joined the other 20 countries contributing troops to UNIFIL.

We are following closely events as they unfold in the political sphere and around the national Lebanese dialogue. We note with concern that the consensual atmosphere prevalent before the eruption of hostilities of this summer is being challenged.

We urge all concerned to put the interests of the Lebanese people above all else and to avoid antagonistic rhetoric. The international community, for its part, should continue supporting the efforts of the Government of Lebanon both for the economic recovery of the worn-torn country and for the

consolidation of its territorial integrity, unity and political independence.

We look forward to receiving the Secretary-General's next report on the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006), and reaffirm our support for his ongoing efforts.

Mr. Churkin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We are grateful to Mr. Gambari for his comprehensive briefing on the situation regarding the settlement in the Middle East. We agree on the whole with his assessment of developments in Palestinian-Israeli relations and in the situation between Syria and Lebanon.

Much has been said at the United Nations in recent weeks about the situation in the Middle East. The situation in the region is constantly evolving, but unfortunately not yet in the optimal direction. Today more than ever before, we need collective steps to redress the situation.

Russia is firmly committed to the principle of two States, Israel and Palestine, existing side by side, as outlined in the Road Map. In our view, that implies the existence of a viable, sovereign and territorially unified Palestine living in peace and security with its neighbour Israel. Progress towards that goal is possible only through a cessation of violence and the parties' compliance with all relevant international obligations.

It remains critical that urgent action be taken to achieve a comprehensive settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict, based on the relevant resolutions of the Security Council, the road map and the proposals of the Quartet of principal international mediators. The latter recently held a meeting in Cairo, at which various options were discussed for reviving the Quartet's collective efforts to overcome the deadlock on the Israeli-Palestinian track.

Russia has consistently promoted the revival of the Middle East peace process on all of its tracks. That core task was at the heart of the recent visit to the region by Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Soltanov. It is important that the Palestinian, Israeli, Egyptian and Jordanian leadership reaffirm the abiding importance of the road map as one of the bases of a Middle East settlement. We also deem it necessary to convene as soon as possible a meeting of the Quartet at the ministerial level, with the participation of the heads of the foreign ministries of Jordan, Egypt and Saudi Arabia. It would also be highly desirable for representatives of Israel and the Palestinian Authority to participate in that meeting.

Given the ongoing Israeli military activity in the Gaza sector, we wish to reaffirm once again our profound concern at such actions. We recognize Israel's right to self-defence, but it should be exercised with maximum restraint and proportionately to the existing threats. We call on the Israeli authorities to refrain from extrajudicial executions and so-called targeted assassinations. At the same time, we urgently appeal once again to the Palestinian Authority to take critical steps to halt the violence and terrorist attacks, including the firing of rockets from Gaza into Israeli territory.

We look forward to the speedy and unconditional release of Israeli soldier Gilat Shalit. We support the mediation efforts in that respect, including those to secure the release of Palestinian ministers and legislators and a number of other Palestinian detainees.

Russia supports the conclusions and recommendations of the Secretary-General, contained in his report (A/ES-10/361) on the register of damage to Palestinian property caused by Israel's construction of the separation wall. We believe that United Nations Members should consider that issue in a pragmatic, non-politicized manner and endorse the Secretary-General's recommendations.

One urgent task is to ensure the strict and full compliance of the parties with the Agreement on Movement and Access. It is essential to resolve questions related to the delivery of humanitarian assistance to Gaza and the resumed functioning of the Rafa and Karni crossing points.

We unconditionally support Palestinian Authority leader Mahmoud Abbas and call on all inhabitants of the Palestinian territories to show solidarity with his efforts to achieve national reconciliation and to create, in Gaza and the West Bank, a Government of national unity, functioning in accordance with the well-known requirements formulated by the Quartet.

It is impossible to ensure the comprehensive nature of the peace process in the Middle East without progress on the Israeli-Syrian track. We believe that support from Damascus and Beirut for the idea of the temporary transfer of the Shaba'a farms to United Nations control could open the way to a resumption of

diplomatic contacts between Israel, Syria and Lebanon in order to reach mutually acceptable agreements. Of course, a positive attitude on the part of the Israeli side will be necessary if that is to occur.

We are closely following progress in the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006). We consistently advocate strict and scrupulous respect for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Lebanon by all parties. In that connection, we stress the inadmissibility of the ongoing violations of its airspace by the Israeli air force. Such actions only raise additional tensions and threaten the security of United Nations peacekeepers.

We were shocked by the news of the murder of Lebanese Minister of Industry and member of Parliament Pierre Gemayel. We decisively condemn the crime and express our sincere condolences to Mr. Gemayel's family. We call for the organizers and perpetrators of that crime and other terrorist acts in Lebanon to be identified and duly punished. It is clear that the ongoing actions of forces seeking to undermine the already tense political situation in Lebanon are unacceptable and should not be allowed to continue. We hope that, at this difficult time, the Lebanese will demonstrate resolve and not give way to provocation or be tempted into confrontation.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as representative of Peru.

I thank Mr. Ibrahim Gambari, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his valuable briefing to the Council today.

First, we wish to express our vigorous condemnation of the assassination of Lebanese Minister Pierre Gemayel and to reiterate our support for the process of sovereign and democratic affirmation in Lebanon. As I said at our meeting of 9 November on this item, this month's serious developments underscore the need to return to the peaceful solution offered by the Quartet's Road Map, which was endorsed by the Security Council in resolution 1515 (2003). That is the required path if we are to meet the goal of two democratic States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security.

To that end, we must encourage the internal cohesion of the Palestinian political regime. The problems of governance in Palestine make it difficult to undertake measures to prevent attacks from Gaza against Israeli objectives. Such attacks are unacceptable. Unfortunately, this situation has not been conducive either to the success of efforts to free the Israeli soldier who was kidnapped on 25 June 2006 or to putting an end to the smuggling of weapons into Gaza.

Moreover, the disproportionate response, which results in civilian Palestinian victims and which Peru has condemned, is a violation of international humanitarian law and creates hurdles to the search for ways to promote dialogue. In that connection, Peru once again urges all the parties involved to break the cycle of violence, destruction and death that has brought so much suffering to both peoples. We also urge the parties to respect the norms of international humanitarian law and to return to the path of dialogue in order to renew the peace process in accordance with the criteria established by the Quartet.

The international community should support the peace process in a constructive way, with a view to easing tension, restoring stability and facilitating the implementation of the Road Map in order to reach a final, just and sustainable solution in the region.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I now give the floor to the representative of Finland.

Ms. Lintonen (Finland): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU). The countries of Bulgaria, Romania, Turkey, Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Ukraine align themselves with this statement.

At the outset, let me express my deepest condolences to the family of Mr. Pierre Gemayel, Lebanon's Minister for Industry, who was assassinated today. The presidency of the European Union condemns in the strongest terms this brutal assassination. The attack comes at a time when the political situation in Lebanon is already critically tense. The European Union urges all parties to refrain from activities that would further endanger the political stability of Lebanon. The European Union reiterates its full support for the legitimate and democratically elected Lebanese Government.

The continuing violence in the Middle East is a cause of deep concern. We have strongly deplored the Israeli military action in Gaza, which is resulting in a growing number of civilian casualties. We have also strongly deplored the firing of rockets into Israeli territory. The deterioration of the situation will only aggravate the already grave circumstances in the region, where a return to a comprehensive peace process with a clear political perspective is urgently needed.

The European Union reaffirms its intention to support Israeli and Palestinian efforts to advance the peace process. We underline our intention to actively contribute to the work within the Quartet to get the Middle East peace process urgently back on track in order to make progress towards a comprehensive settlement on the basis of the Road Map, relevant resolutions of the Security Council and the commitments made at Sharm el-Sheikh in 2005.

The European Union reiterates its call for the immediate release of the abducted Israeli soldier and commends the efforts in the region to that end, including by partners. We also repeat our call for the immediate release of Palestinian ministers and legislators detained in Israel.

The European Union urges the Palestinians to work for national unity and to form a government with a platform that reflects Quartet principles and allows for early engagement. Such a government of national unity would also be a partner for the international community in the effort to relaunch the peace process. We underline the importance of preserving and strengthening the capacity of the institutions of the Palestinian Authority and express our readiness to provide enhanced support to a Palestinian government that the EU can engage with.

The European Union remains deeply concerned at the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Gaza and the West Bank and recalls its commitment to help the Palestinian people. We reiterate our call on Israel for the immediate resumption of transfers of withheld Palestinian tax and customs revenues. We encourage donors and others to make full use of the temporary international mechanism.

The European Union emphasizes the importance of the implementation of the Agreement of Movement and Access of November 2005. We call on Israel as well to respect previous agreements and to fulfil its obligations under them. We insist on the particular importance of regular operations at Gaza crossings, notably at the Rafah crossing, and call on Israel to do its utmost to ensure that the crossings be opened and that they remain open.

On Lebanon, the European Union encourages all Lebanese parties to reach consensus and to resume the process of national dialogue. We continue to be committed to supporting the legitimate and democratically elected Lebanese Government and its efforts to stabilize the situation in the country and maintain its unity. In that regard, the EU fully supports the reconstruction process in the perspective of the Paris conference in January 2007. The European Union reiterates its call for the immediate release of the two abducted Israeli soldiers. We renew our determination to support the full implementation of resolution 1701 (2006), and call on all parties in the region to comply with the resolution, especially the arms embargo.

Lebanon's sovereignty over its land, sea and airspace must be respected by all. The European Union urges Israel to stop violations of Lebanese airspace by the Israeli air force. We welcome the deployment of troops of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon and of the Lebanese armed forces, which is progressing well.

We call on countries in the region to refrain from any interference in Lebanon's internal affairs, in accordance with Security Council resolutions, and to provide firm support to Lebanon's Government in reconstruction efforts.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Cuba.

Mr. Malmierca Díaz (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): We would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Ibrahim Gambari for the information he has given us. As he himself has said, in the time that has passed since the Council held a meeting similar to this one, on 19 October 2006, the situation has not improved in the Middle East, and especially in occupied Palestinian territory — quite to the contrary. The assassination of Lebanon's Minister for Industry is fresh evidence of that fact. We condemn that act and extend our sincere condolences to the Government and people of Lebanon and to the family of the Minister.

As the Non-Aligned Movement has set out in recent statements, the ongoing deterioration of the

situation in occupied Palestinian territory is a matter of concern, especially as a result of the disproportionate, indiscriminate and excessive use of force by Israel, which has resulted in great loss of life and injuries to Palestinian civilians.

Despite the continuing deterioration of the situation, including the terrible massacre that took place in Beit Hanoun on 8 November 2006, the Security Council has not been able to act and continues to fail to fulfil its responsibilities for the maintenance of international peace and security. As we know, on 11 November 2006, the United States cast its thirty-first veto in connection with a text having to do with the question of the Middle East. The draft resolution in question was a balanced document introduced at the Council by the delegation of Qatar on behalf of the Arab Group. The draft resolution failed owing to that veto, despite the fact that it received a favourable vote from the majority of the Security Council, including all the countries of the Non-Aligned Movement that are currently members of the Council. The Council's inaction seriously affects not only its already diminished credibility; it also strengthens the Israeli Government's sense of impunity, which feels fully protected by the unjustifiable United States veto.

In the face of the Security Council's paralysis resulting from the abuse of the veto, there was no alternative but to go to the General Assembly, a forum in which we all participate on an equal footing and where there is no place for the anti-democratic and obsolete right of veto.

By an overwhelming majority, the Assembly adopted, at its resumed tenth emergency special session, a resolution setting out specific measures. Cuba calls for the immediate and full implementation of that resolution in all its aspects, including the dispatch by the Secretary-General of a fact-finding mission on the attack that took place in Beit Hanoun, with a view to informing the General Assembly within a 30-day period.

The Security Council cannot continue to remain idle in the face of Israel's flagrant violations of its resolutions. It is unacceptable for this organ to continue to shirk its ongoing responsibility with respect to the question of Palestine while this issue has not been resolved in all its aspects on the basis of international law.

The Security Council must immediately adopt the measures necessary for Israel to put an end to the occupation and to its illegitimate and illegal practices in the occupied Palestinian territories, including the illegal construction of the wall, which have as a goal to seize and to annex Palestinian land and property and to alter the demographic and geographical nature of the Palestinian territory.

Cuba reaffirms its commitment to a just and peaceful solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and to the right of the Palestinian people to exercise their right to self-determination and sovereignty in an independent Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

We reiterate also our request that Israel comply with resolution 497 (1981) and that it withdraw from the entire occupied Syrian Golan back to the line of 4 June 1967, in compliance with resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

Cuba welcomes the seriousness with which the Government of Lebanon has been complying with its obligations under resolution 1701 (2006), including the deployment of the Lebanese army in the southern region of the country and for its excellent level of cooperation with the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL).

Lebanon's sovereignty and territorial integrity must be fully respected. The Government of Israel must comply with its obligations and immediately cease all acts of provocation against Lebanon, including the ongoing violations of that country's airspace.

I should like to conclude by reiterating the urgent need to put an end to the protracted and illegal Israeli occupation of all of the Arab territories occupied since 1967 and to resume the Middle East peace process.

In that respect, we would underscore the importance of the Arab Peace Initiative adopted at Beirut in 2002, as well as the recent call made by the Arab summit held at Khartoum in March to revitalize the Arab Peace Initiative.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): The next speaker on my list is the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran, to whom I give the floor.

Mr. Sadeghi (Islamic Republic of Iran): Allow me to begin by expressing our deep sorrow and

condolences to the people and the Government of Lebanon in connection with the criminal and terrorist act that took place in Lebanon today. We were shocked to hear of the assassination of Mr. Pierre Gemayel and strongly condemn this heinous terrorist act. The fact that this criminal act took place on the very day when the Security Council is discussing yet again Israeli crimes and atrocities in Palestine and the wider region of the Middle East raises serious questions and concerns.

This meeting of the Security Council offers an opportunity to review the difficult circumstances and the gravity of the security and humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territories and the wider region in the light of the developments of the past several months, developments that have resulted in the cruel loss of innocent human lives and in significant destruction of the basic infrastructure in the Palestinian and Lebanese territories, in flagrant violation of international legality.

Recent rounds of aggression resulted in a display of more images showing the inherent dynamics of occupation, sustained by collective punishment, the indiscriminate use of military force and utter disregard for international human rights and humanitarian law. Given the nature of occupation, Israeli provocations are showing no sign of abating, as the occupiers are doomed to constantly planning further acts of aggression.

Consequently, while Palestinian homes and civilian infrastructure are completely at the mercy of the Israeli air force and artillery, the Israeli regime continues to violate resolution 1701 (2006), including through daily violations of Lebanese airspace and harassment of UNIFIL forces, as United Nations and UNIFIL spokespersons repeatedly report to all of us.

What we have witnessed over the short span of time since last summer is indicative of what generations of Palestinians and others in the region have gone through in the past several decades. Some wish to make it a routine matter, an inescapable fixture of the region. It represents the continuation of the established Israeli policy of using military force to dictate a solution to the rightful resistance that would be mounted by any people under occupation.

If we take history as a guide, we will see that no occupying Power has ever been able to force an occupied people into submission, and the approach that the Israeli regime is taking now has been tested time and again under similar circumstances and has always proved futile.

Likewise, all signs indicate that resistance against the occupation of Palestine has only been growing in ferocity and strength in the past several decades, and the result of the actions of the occupiers and those who support them has been more tension and turmoil in the region, with a growing impact across the world.

The tragedy of Palestine lies at the heart of the Middle East conflict. It is the major source of the anger and desperation that is being felt throughout the Muslim world. Israel's criminal acts against the Palestinians and other peoples of the region and their impact on the Islamic world represent the gravest challenge to global security. It is evident that full restoration of the rights of the Palestinian people and the establishment of a democratic Palestinian State with Al-Quds as its capital are imperative for the attainment of comprehensive and lasting peace and stability in the Middle East and beyond.

Peace in the Middle East cannot be achieved through aggression, State terrorism, intimidation or occupation. We are convinced that durable peace in Palestine and the Middle East will be possible only through justice; an end to discrimination and to the occupation of Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese territories; the return of all Palestinian refugees; and a democratic mechanism through which all inhabitants of Palestine, as well as Palestinians driven out of their homeland, would have the possibility of determining their future in a democratic and peaceful fashion.

Given the huge threat that the Israeli occupation poses to regional and international peace and security, it should be treated as the most important item on the agenda of the Security Council. As the Council has been seized of this matter for several decades, its failure to put an end to the Israeli occupation has denied hope to the people of Palestine and left them with no other choice but to stay the course of resistance.

Under these circumstances, there should be no doubt that those who impede justice and accountability for Israeli war crimes by repeatedly abusing the veto power bear responsibility for the bloodshed that we are witnessing time and again. They are also responsible for the undermining of the authority and credibility of the Security Council brought about by their actions.

The international community should not allow periodic Israeli military aggressions against an exhausted and defenceless civilian population to continue, as their impact on the region and beyond are growing increasingly severe. So far silence and inaction have been interpreted by the Israeli regime as consent, and even encouragement, for more criminal activities. The international community should firmly condemn and denounce Israel's scorn for international law and its contempt for the purposes and principles of the United Nations. More importantly, the impunity with which the Israeli regime carries out its criminal acts should be brought to an end.

The Israeli regime should be made to understand that it cannot continue to violate the basic elements of human rights and international humanitarian law in the Palestinian territories and to occupy Palestinian land with impunity. Its practices in the occupied Palestinian territories must be investigated, and it must be assigned criminal responsibility for the destruction that has resulted from its aggression. We hope that the efforts under way in the General Assembly will lead, inter alia, to an independent international investigation into the recent aggression in Gaza and its implications for and under international humanitarian law.

Before concluding, I would like to place on record the fact that my delegation rejects the baseless allegations raised once again against my country at today's meeting. Indeed, no one present here nor any other member of the international community needs to be reminded of how absurd those allegations are. None of us need to be reminded that no smokescreen can conceal the atrocities and the crimes of the Israeli regime in Palestine and in the wider region.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.